

and for our civilians gradually reduces itself, partly because Iraq continues to make additional progress. But I think the Iraqi people can understand that, as President of the United States, if I'm putting civilians in the field in order to help the Iraqi people build their economy and improve their productivity, I want to make sure that they come home, because they are not soldiers.

So that makes the numbers larger than they otherwise would be, but the overall mission that they're carrying out is comparable to the missions that are taking place in other countries that are big, that are important, and that are friends of ours. Okay?

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser December 13, 2011

Hello, everybody! Hello, hello, hello! Thank you. Love you guys. Thank you so much. All right, everybody have a seat. I don't want to milk this too much here. [Laughter]

To Matthew, thank you for your extraordinary leadership. We could not be prouder of you. And for you to have made all the life-changing sacrifices to take on this job, it's something that I couldn't be prouder of. So please give Matthew a big round of applause. He's working hard.

Jane Stetson, Andy Tobias, they are doing remarkable work for the DNC. And our outstanding chairwoman of the DNC, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, is in the house. Give her a big round of applause as well.

I don't want to give a long speech. I want to save most of my time for questions and discussion with all of you. I've got two simple messages. Number one, thank you. I look around the room: Everybody here has gone above and beyond the call of duty, not just for the last few months, but for several years now. I'm reminded of what my friend Ab Mikva said about being friends with a politician: It's like having a perpetual child in college. [Laughter] It just never stops. [Laughter] But all of you have just done incredible work with great cheer and great determination. And I'm thankful for it.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:24 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, USA, commanding general, U.S. Forces—Iraq. Prime Minister Maliki referred to Secretary General Nabil Elaraby of the League of Arab States; Acting Minister of Defense Sadun al-Dulaymi of Iraq; and Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta. Prime Minister Maliki and two reporters spoke in Arabic, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Which brings me to the second point. The reason you do it, I'd like to think, is a little bit because you like me and you think I'm a pretty good guy. [Laughter] I definitely know that part of it is because you love Michelle and think she's one of the best First Ladies we've ever had. But the main reason you do it is because you know what's at stake.

Back in 2008, we used to talk about this being a historic moment for America, that we were at a crossroads in our history. Well, we haven't fully crossed the road, and in some ways, 2012 is even more important than it was 4 years ago. The choices could not be starker. The vision about where we want to take the country could not be more different.

I gave a speech in Kansas last week where I talked about where we need to go as a country, a country that's based on everybody having a fair shot, a country that depends on everybody doing their fair share, a country where fair play applies across the board. And I talked about how, for decades now, people have felt that the basic compact that if you worked hard, you acted responsibly, you looked after your family, that you would be able to be in the middle class, stay in the middle class, get into the middle class, that your kids would have a better life than you did, that you'd have some semblance of security, that that compact had eroded.

And it hadn't happened overnight, it wasn't going to be solved overnight, but there were going to be some critical things that we had to do to make sure that compact was restored: making investments in education so our kids are better prepared than anybody in the world, making sure that we've got the best infrastructure to move products and services and our businesses can thrive, making sure that we're investing in science and basic research, making sure that the rules of the road apply to everybody. So we're not building a bubble economy, but we're building an economy based on making stuff and exporting it around the world stamped with the words "Made in America." And most fundamentally, understanding that we're all in this together, it's not a few of us doing well and then the rest of us hoping that we get lucky, but rather, everybody as a team moving this country forward.

And that vision, in contrast to a vision that basically says you are on your own, is what this election was about in 2008. It's what this election is going to be about in 2012. I am confident that the vision that we believe in so deeply and that we've worked so hard for is the vision that is truest to our history and most representative of the core decency of the American people.

But we're going to have to fight for it. It's not a slam dunk. We're going to have to deliver this message effectively all across the country. And at a time when people have been battered by the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, it's understandable if people aren't feeling as chipper as they were back in 2008.

Remarks at Fort Bragg, North Carolina December 14, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello, Fort Bragg! All the way!

Audience members. Airborne!

The President. Now, I'm sure you realize why I don't like following Michelle Obama. [Laughter] She's pretty good. And it is true, I am a little biased, but let me just say it: Mi-

chelle, you are a remarkable First Lady. You are a great advocate for military families. And you're cute. [Laughter] I'm just saying—gentlemen, that's your goal: to marry up. Punch above your weight.

There's going to be some skepticism. There's going to be some pushback. All of the things that we've done over the last 3 years—to rescue the economy and rescue the auto industry and end the war in Iraq and end "don't ask, don't tell" and make sure that health care is in place and financial reform brings back some integrity to the financial sector—all those things don't mean that much to somebody if they're still out of work right now or if their house is still underwater by \$100,000.

So yes, this is going to be tough. But I just want to remind all of you that you didn't decide to support Barack Hussein Obama because it was going to be easy. There were always easier choices to make, just as there would have been easier political choices for me to make. We took a flyer on this thing because we believe passionately in an America in which everybody is getting ahead.

That's worth fighting for. And here's my message to you. If you guys stick with this, if you don't falter, if you stay steady, we are going to win this thing. We are going to win this thing, and America is going to win as a consequence.

All right? Thank you, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill. In his remarks, he referred to Matthew W. Barzun, national finance chair of the President's 2012 election campaign; Jane Stetson, national finance chair, and Andrew Tobias, treasurer, Democratic National Committee; and former White House Counsel Abner J. Mikva.